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THE HISTORICAL AND STYLISTIC BACKGROUND
OF THE MUSIC OF EPHRAIM AMU

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There is no single individual who has influenced the course of the development of art music in contemporary Ghana as much as Dr. Ephraim Amu. Barely five decades ago, his was the voice of one crying the wilderness in an effort to decolonize music and musical studies in Ghana. Although today there are a few others on the scene, those of us who have come to know, understand and appreciate his life and work as a musician recognize not only his singular achievement as a pathfinder in contemporary modes of composition in the African idiom, but also his contribution to the fields of African musicology and music education.

Born on September 13, 1899 in Peki-Avetile, Amu grew up in a home that was once a part of the traditional musical environment, for his father was a traditional drummer and singer before he became a Christian and gave up drumming. It is no wonder therefore, that he took a particular interest in music when he went to school in Peki. He was taught to play the harmonium by the late Theodore Ntem when he attended the Presbyterian Seminary at Abetifi where he was trained as a teacher and catechist. On completion of his training, he was appointed to the staff of the Middle School in Peki-Blengo in 1920. He tried not only to pass on his acquired knowledge of western music theory to his pupils and give them practical lessons, but also to write songs for them. He continued his own musical studies by taking lessons in harmony with the late Reverend J.E. Allotey-Pappoe. These lessons and his own private studies prepared him for the position he took up six years later as a member of the staff of the Presbyterian Training College, Akropong. It was during his tenure at Akropong that he became a national figure as an innovative composer, a reputation which has remained unsurpassed to this day.

The Cultural Activism of Amu

For many Ghanaians who have enjoyed Amu’s music or marveled at his personality, what he represented in the colonial period and after goes beyond his professional achievement, for because of his unusual gift for awakening consciousness – particularly in respect of ethical, social and political values and the assertion of identity – he became a national symbol of cultural activism and creative patriotism. He dared to “say in song” what others later wished they could express as clearly and as forcefully in speech. When nationalism was most deeply awakened in Ghana, there was already a lively patriotic song by him, for as a man of vision, he had long anticipated the birth of Ghana.

*Yen ara asase ni* (This land is our own) was written in a popular rhythmic mode almost two decades before the incident of the Christianborg Crossroad was so well known that it could be used for rousing and channeling the surging spirit of national consciousness.
Because of the impact he made on Ghanaians, stories – some of them rather wild stories – circulated about him. The sober ones portrayed him as someone who had consciously changed his lifestyle in order to liberate himself from the shackles of colonial culture, for he had refused to wear formal western attire in spite of the Church, preferring instead the traditional cloth as a formal and regular wear, and his own substitute of work and business clothes made out of locally spun cotton. He was described as a man who loved to serve water in calabashes and soup in earthen pots but who did not mind using imported cutlery.

There were also stories that made him seem like a spectacular character in an ananse story. Some of them depicted him as a highly imaginative craftsman who spent time carving his own wooden versions of western artifacts such as bicycles. No one questioned the truth of this or any of the other stories that circulated far and wide, for myths and legends do gather round men of striking or forceful personalities. Little did people realize as we now do, that he was not an ananse hero obsessed by passing fancies, but a cultural activist who felt strongly that Ghana could be easily swept off her feet unless she preserved and developed her own culture and institutions. As he expressed it later in song, *Tete wo bi* – the past has something to say to us, something to show us, lessons to teach us, ideas and thoughts to inspire us as well as creative models to give us. However defective such models may now seem to us, we must not forget that “it is the crooked stem that bears and supports offshoots of straight branches.”

Although Amu’s ideas seemed radical and militant in the servile colonial period, he was not altogether uncompromising where matters of principle were not at stake. His philosophy of cultural development recognized the need for borrowing and adaptation where appropriate. Hence he exhorted Ghanaians, as many have since done, to value their culture, saying it loud and clear: “There is no harm in embracing the good things of other cultures that have universal values, but by all means let us keep the best in our own.”

It is this philosophy that led him to develop his own type of syncretism as well as principles of accommodation and incorporation which resolved the apparent contradictions in the musical choices that he made. For example, it seemed logical to him to keep a grand piano and African drums in his home, and to allow his choral and instrumental music to be influenced to some extent by Western ideas of harmony where he thought this might lead to enrichment or an extension of traditional practice. On the other hand, his philosophy led him to reject western alternatives where the traditional African equivalents seemed better to him in terms of his own artistic sensibility or aesthetic and cultural values. Hence, he vehemently refused to substitute the western flute and recorder for the African bamboo flute and odurugya for fear that this would impoverish the quality or the peculiar charm of African flute music. Similarly, having settled for the piano, he could not adopt the guitar even though he recognized its potential since it had found its way into the musical traditions of some Ghanaian communities. It seemed to him that the seperewa harp lute whose music and poetry he greatly admired should be the first instrument of adoption and development by contemporary Ghanaian musicians.

Thus, for Amu, music became not only a focus of creativity and performance as well as an object of aesthetic interest which could be promoted through concerts, but also a field of cultural development which demanded knowledge of African traditions as well as creative imagination and
the exercise of conscious choices guided by awareness of African cultural values to which he had made a firm commitment.

The Stylistic Periods of Amu’s Songs

It is evident from the foregoing that Amu’s music can be better understood and appreciated when viewed in terms of his cultural philosophy and the historical contexts in which he composed his songs as well as the theoretical considerations which determined his choice of techniques and procedures for writing the kind of music he felt would be understood and accepted by both literate and non-literate music makers in traditional and contemporary Ghanaian societies to whom he addressed himself.

The periodization followed in this review is based principally on changes in the style of Amu’s compositions which sometimes correlated with the institutions in which he worked.

First there is the Early Period which started in the 1920s and ended around 1937 when Amu decided to expand his bi-musicality by pursuing studies in composition at the Royal College of Music in London. It has two phases. Phase one begins in Peki and continues to the early years at Akropong. Phase two begins at Akropong and continues to the early years at Achimota school.

The second major stylistic period – the Middle Period – begins from 1937 and ends in 1951 with the transfer of Amu’s School of Music from the campus of Achimota to Kumasi (College of Science and Technology).

The third period described here as the Later Period begins from 1952 to the present. The more active phase of this period is from about 1952 to 1962, while the period 1963 to the present represents a period of consolidation of the total creative output, culminating in the publication of his complete works.

COMPOSITIONS OF THE EARLY PERIOD 1920-1937

Like most literate musicians in the colonial period, Amu’s career as a composer began with the writing of songs in the Western idiom. Some of them (such as the anthem of the Presbyterian Training College, Akropong) were set to English words, while others, such as Biakoye, Israel Hene) were set to Twi words. There was a precedence for the latter in the Seminary Tunes – a compilation of songs consisting of a selection of the works of Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and other composers set to Twi words, and which were learned by the students of the Training College during their music lessons or choral practice attended by the whole student body. Because it was a male college, the songs were arranged for T.T.B.B., a practice emulated by Amu in his western style as well as his African compositions of this period.

Three events led Amu away from continuing to write in the western idiom whose craft of composition he had acquired. The first was his awareness of the need for reform in church music which came to him when he noticed that during worship, many of the members of the congregation,
particularly the non-literate, either did not sing at all or did not sing as heartily as one finds in traditional society. He blamed this on the musical idiom of the hymns.

The second was an event in London that changed his colonial orientation. The thought that African music might have a great deal to offer in political and cultural awareness was strengthened by the ideas expressed in a pamphlet entitled “West African at the Bar of the Family of Nations” published by the West African Students Union in London to commemorate the death of Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey of Ghana. The detailed exposition of African culture and the high esteem in which African languages, music, dance and art were held by these students made a deep impression on him.

The third was his response to a confrontation by a missionary colleague who asked him why he was not collecting and transcribing the songs sung by the workmen on the College campus in order to teach them to his students. Although some of these songs were in a hybrid style, they had enough character to inspire him to explore traditional music in its original setting, to work out its theory, and to use this knowledge in the development of a new compositional idiom. This challenge also led him to grapple with the problem of notations, for he had to decide on the best way of writing down the traditional and popular tunes as well as his own music in the notation that was familiar to most Ghanaians at that time – the staff notation.

**Songs in the African Idiom**

Because Amu’s primary goal was to write songs that could be understood by people in the predominantly Akan environment in which he worked, he wrote most of his new songs in Twi and only a few in Ewe, his own language. However, his Ewe songs such as *Miva Miva* and *Ɛsrɔm miele* were greatly appreciated in the Akan areas, just as his Twi songs were appreciated outside the Akan linguistic boundaries, for there was something in the music itself – the “folk-like” qualities of the tunes and their simple part structures and rhythms – that always made an impact on those who did not even understand the words to which they were set. Nevertheless, Amu chose his words very carefully, for he always had something to say – a religious, social, or political sentiment to express or arouse in his audience. Accordingly, he composed both secular and sacred songs.

As far as sacred songs are concerned, he wrote not only general songs of praise and songs of exhortation on the Christian ideals of conduct or about virtues such as humility, steadfastness, watchfulness, perseverance and courage, but also songs appropriate for the important events of the Christian calendar such as Good Friday, Easter, Christmas and Epiphany. Now and then he also wrote for particular occasions, for example for the ordination of a colleague.

Because of his theological background, he drew not only on biblical texts and phrases from the Christian liturgy, but also framed his own exegesis into the lyrics, particularly where he felt the need for developing a number of verses for the same tune. Wherever appropriate he also used the phraseology of traditional proverbs or quoted or expounded on actual proverbs such as “ɔkɔtɔ now anoma” (the crab does not give birth to a bird), or stock phrases such as “ɔtwɛ anaa adowa” (the duiker or the antelope, that is, all and sundry). Such traditional usages always impressed his adult audiences sensitive to the verbal art of their society. Indeed one would now and then hear quotations from his songs such as “adidi mpo yɛ animia” (even eating – being able to feed oneself...
– requires effort). Hence from the very beginning his songs appealed to Ghanaians not only through the music, but also through the words. He maintained this dual channel of communication in all his songs, for he learnt very early in his research that to be an effective composer in the African tradition, one must be at once a sensitive musician and poet.

Because Amu’s nationalistic sentiments deepened as he collected and learnt traditional songs, he did not confine himself to the writing of sacred songs. He also wrote a number of secular songs during the early period of his career as a composer. These included patriotic songs like Yen ara asase ni (This land is our own), Yaanom Abibirrimma (Sons of Africa) and Akwaabadwom (Song of Welcome to the Victors), as well as songs through which he could give general counsel, inspire courage or draw attention to cultural values.

Because of the poetic images that he used, some of his songs texts are capable of being interpreted as proverbs. For example, the song Onipa retu nan yi na n’anim ara na ɔkɔ rendered in English by Amu as “Man must be advancing, for look, his legs are moving,” could be taken simply as a hilarious marching song, or metaphorically as a song about progress. “When man sets out on life’s journey, he must always strive to go forward. For it is only when one takes a step forward that one makes good progress and goes ahead of those who sit down doing nothing in particular.” The song concludes, “Wish the traveler passing by Godspeed and all the best.”

Just as events of the Christian calendar led Amu to write songs appropriate for such occasions, so did secular events and other life experiences inspire some of his secular songs such as Agorɔ anya ɔdɔ mma which extols love as the goal and spirit of competition at sporting events, or Nkradi the parting song based on the proverb “the chameleon walks slowly but nevertheless reaches its final destination.”

Sometimes the inspiration to write came to him not only through his own reflections on life but also through the requests that some individuals made to him for songs they could teach their school children or choirs. This paradoxically was the genesis of Yen ara asase ni which he wrote in Ewe at the request of a teacher in Peki who wanted a song that could be sung on Empire Day. He responded to many such requests as well as events in the life of his close associates in a similar manner and always wrote lyrics that dealt with the meaning and significance of an event or his feelings about it rather than the event itself. This made it possible for his songs to be performed subsequently in other appropriate contexts without any loss of meaning, or the embarrassment of specific references that may be irrelevant or inappropriate for other occasions. Many people enjoy his songs without knowing the stories behind them, for the stories are in the final analysis, much less important than the message and the sentiments or experiences that he tries to share.

**The Educational Value of Amu’s Early Compositions**

Amu’s first batch of compositions – his pioneering effort – was published in 1933 by Sheldon Press. Before this his name and his songs had already spread far and wide, for he began to attract attention five years before the publication came out. His Training College students who learnt his songs came from nearly all parts of the country and enjoyed teaching them to others. It was a delightful performance of the weaving song *Bonwire Kente* and other songs on a Sunday evening
in the Presbyterian Church of Mampong Ashanti by three of his students on vacation that attracted me to the Presbyterian Training College, Akropong when I decided to train as a teacher.

The importance of the publication of Amu’s songs can be seen from the comments of the Education Department as well as from the reviews written by music educators in Ghana and abroad. The Editorial of the Teachers Journal (Vol. V, 1933) spoke warmly of the book and stated emphatically:

“This is a book which every teacher, whether he speaks Twi or not, is strongly recommended to purchase.”

A reviewer of the book similarly wrote in the same journal:

“Every teacher should have a copy of this excellent little book and should use it in his singing lessons...The book as it stands provides a good course of class instruction in African rhythm.”

In conclusion, the reviewer expressed the hope

“...that other books of this kind will appear both from Mr. Amu himself, and also from other authors. We used to be told that African music could not be used in schools because there are no African songs with words suitable for children. We are grateful to Mr. Amu for supplying this need.”

**Amu’s Solutions to Stylistic Problems**

A number of ambiguities surrounded the early style of Amu which were noticed by “outsiders” such as the above reviewer, but which were not questioned by the African community at that time because for them it was a major break-through and a welcome change from the purely foreign style that had dominated the scene. Amu himself claimed that his new style was *African*, but he never claimed that it was completely traditional, a point often missed by Western-oriented African critics who, like most western critics, not only look at his effort outside its historical context, but invariably also assess it solely from the perspectives of its western component – the harmonies he uses.

Compared with the western style of composition that had emerged in Ghana and the earlier songs that he himself wrote, Amu’s new African songs were indeed oriented in the direction of African musical style except the he was careful enough not to go the whole hog as this would have meant a total rejection of his effort by the very people for whom he was writing at the time. Accordingly, instead of writing for two voices in the traditional manner he knew, he wrote for four voices, that is, in the four-part style that his non-traditional audience had come to associate with church music, particularly the hymn and the anthem. But he attempted a compromise by arranging the voices in two parts here and there in accordance with African tradition as exemplified in the style of the Akan and the Ewe of the middle belt of the Volta Region. He exploited call and response used in traditional music, sometimes giving the call to one voice, sometimes giving it to
two voices singing in parallel thirds or their inversions. When all the voices sang simultaneously, he would make them sing in unison, in thirds, in three parts or in straight four-part harmony.

If one compares the simple four part harmonies of Twenty Five African Songs with his earlier compositions in the western idiom such as Israel Hene, one would find that the choice of these simpler harmonies was deliberate, for he commanded more resources than he cared to use. This is why he found it necessary to advise those who learnt his songs to stick to the harmonies he had used and not alter than or add “flourishes,” for he had tried to evolve a new harmonic style appropriate for this type of African music – harmony in which the traditional parallel thirds of African polyphony found not only among his own people but also the Akan, the Builsa, the Kassena, Nankani, the Konkomba and others predominated.

On the other hand, in his treatment of rhythm, he did not find the need for any compromise. He went all out to exploit the basic forms used in traditional African music for it is this more than anything else that he felt gave an African character to the music of his culture. No other aspect of African music seems to have been given as much attention, for the introduction to his Twenty Five African Songs gives eighty carefully graded exercises in African rhythm but none in any other aspect of the music. The exercises were based on African melodic progressions and popular tunes, but his objective was not towards establishing African melodic types but rather in demonstrating the variety of rhythm patterns one might meet in African songs. It seems clear that rhythm was what he found missing in the compositions of members of the church and some of the popular songs of his time, something that made all the difference to his music.

In addition to rhythm, Amu followed the melodic usages of his culture rather closely. No doubt this was one of the features that made his songs popular everywhere. Coming from a musical tradition which used the seven-tone scale, however, he concentrated on this scale to the exclusion of all other African scales.

Because he accepted the western tempered scale and indeed western diatonic harmony as approximations to the usages of his own culture, he did not mind writing solos in his new idiom with piano or harmonium accompaniment, since the idea that African music could be played or adapted for playing on non-African instruments had been established by popular usage before he came to write for the piano.

Of course, he kept his interest in such traditional instruments as he could study at the time. He loved the seperewa harp lute and learnt to make it. He developed a particular liking for the bamboo flute (atenteben) and odurugya and tried later to improve on their design and range.

Amu also learnt to play traditional drums, something he could have picked up as child if his father had not abandoned his specialization as a drummer. However, because of the opposition of the church to drumming, he was never able to combine it with sacred songs. Indeed it appears that he very rarely composed songs with full drumming accompaniment in mind. It was only when he wrote incidental music for the theatre or wrote music for the bamboo flute ensemble that he thought of drumming as an integral part of the composition. But he liked to include traditional forms of singing and drumming in his concert programs – such as the song and drum forms of abofoo
(hunters dance), asafo chorus and drumming, the simple drum pieces of fontomfrom (bommaa) and mpintin ensembles.

**Amu’s Songs as Models**

A number of favorable factors helped to establish Amu’s style as a model. Because his book received the support of the Department of Education, his music became firmly established in educational institutions. As traditional music had not found a proper place in schools, his songs became a substitute for this, although it was not his intention that songs from the traditional repertoire should not be learnt as well, for he himself taught a few to his students.

Because his music had favorable reception in the community, encouragement was given to its development in the church. Choral groups popularly known as Singing Bands sprang up in the church. They specialized in songs in the new style established by Amu.

The growth of singing bands and the continued use of Amu’s music in educational institutions led to the emergence of a new generation of composers who specialized in his new type of “institutional music” – music for the church, schools and concert halls. There were at least three formal models established by Amu that they could use as the basis of their songs in addition to his rhythmic and harmonic procedures and the solutions to the problem of texture evident in his songs.

First there was the *choral anthem model* which had become characteristic of his style and which may well be designated as the “Amu model,” even though he himself was conscious of its derivation. As it will be called, it breaks away from traditional music by using the framework of S.A.T.B. or T.T.B.B. and the Amu type of four-part harmony in combination with rhythms in which “alternating duple and triple effects” predominate. The music is generally in strict rhythm with a tempo of $= 80-100$, or in alternations of free rhythm and strict time. It is often performed a capella.

The second formal category includes adaptations of formal types in traditional music. Included in this are choral types based on asafo (songs of warrior organizations). A rousing cry by a cantor or a group singing in unison followed by a chorus response in the form of a shout or yell or a phrase in two, three or four-part harmony. This introductory statement is followed by the main body of the song. Examples of this are *Onyame ne Sahene*, and *Yaanom Abibirimma*.

Third, in addition to models based on traditional music, Amu utilized forms based on Ghanaian popular music, in particular the “Yaa Amponsaa” model. Examples of songs in this form are *Yɛn ara asase ni*, and *Onipa retu ne nan yi*.

**COMPOSITIONS OF THE MIDDLE PERIOD 1937-1951**

The transition from the Early Period to the Middle Period of Amu’s career as a composer was by no means uneventful, for because of his cultural activism there was a latent conflict between him and the authorities of the Presbyterian Church which came to a head in 1933, culminating in the termination of his appointment as a teacher at the Presbyterian Training College. He accepted
the decision of the Church gallantly since the issue that precipitated it was something on which he could not compromise. Moreover, he felt that the orientation of the Church would change in due course and that since it was not a matter of doctrinal difference, there was no reason why he should not continue as a member of the church to compose sacred songs and participate in worship and other activities like all others. The termination of his appointment as a teacher did not mean expulsion from the Church.

As luck would have it, the change in Amu’s status proved to be a blessing in disguise for he was immediately offered appointment as a teacher at Achimota, an institution sympathetic to his cultural activism, for long before his arrival, the tradition of “tribal drumming” introduced by Robert Fisher at the Government Training College which became the nucleus of Achimota in 1926 had been maintained at Achimota. According to Kingsley Williams, the social “festival” of drumming

“was on Saturday night near the full moon. In this, the College was consciously opposing traditional educational theory which at that time was inclined to frown on things unfamiliar to Europeans.”

This initiative was due to some extent to the liberal policy of the first principal of Achimota, A.G. Fraser, for as he saw it,

“Education means neither pumping information into a receptacle nor ‘educing’ latent abilities, but ‘leading forth’ sheep to pasture. African arts, crafts, traditions, history are the proper subject matter of early education in Africa, and an African language its proper medium.” (Kingsley Williams: Achimota pp. 10-11)

Apparently when Amu “arrived on staff” of Achimota, he was “critical of the standard of the drumming” in the institution. Unsuccessful had been made to get help from local drummers. Later, “reliance was placed on those students who seemed to know more than their fellows, and sometimes they were blind guides.” Kingsley Williams tells us further that as far as drumming was concerned,

“It was Ephraim Amu’s arrival that really gave it status and that also spread a knowledge and love of the African music which like so many of the arts was beginning to disappear.” (Achimota p. 73)

The new environment in which Amu now had to work and the warm reception he had from his colleagues encouraged him to take another look at his own cultural philosophy and his mode of operation, for he had joined an institution which had set up a department of music with a heavy concentration of Western music theory and practice. He knew that his task was to provide the African input so that a truly bi-musical program might emerge not only for those taking music as a special subject, but also for the student population as a whole. Accordingly, his creative output in this period was influenced by the need for school music – music that could be sung by the whole student population at school worship and other formal occasions, as well as music for church choirs. To enable him to continue some of the traditions he had started at Akropong and also
provide an outlet for works that could not be taught to students, he formed an adult choir at Anumle where the clerical and other staff of the School lived.

The challenge of the new situation and his own interest in bi-musicality encouraged him, after a great deal of deliberation, to accept the offer of scholarship to study music abroad. Acquiring further knowledge of the literature of western music and its varied techniques of composition might not only enrich his own background, but also lead him to reflect on his music and appraise the techniques he had been using thus far. Accordingly, arrangements were made for him to enroll at the Royal College of Music, London in 1937. He decided not just to audition courses but to study for the associate diploma of the college as a full-time student. As a correspondent of *West Africa* reported in 1956, he did not regret this, for he knew what he wanted. He observes that

“To the study of African music, Mr. Amu has brought his training in Western music, and feels that to have been able to approach it with a trained mind has been of infinite value… All through his training in London he was acquiring reasons and musical principles which finally made his interest in his national music an exercise of the mind and an instinctive delight.” (West Africa 1956: 1571)

**Stylistic Sophistication**

As would be expected, Amu’s approach to composition underwent a number of changes during this period. For unlike the Early Period in which his choral music was directed to congregations and the general public and led to the choice of forms and textures that could be understood by all and sundry, compositions in the Middle Period assumed the character of fine art music – that is, music in which a great deal of attention is given to the “musical” or technical and artistic interest of the piece as a focus of aesthetic enjoyment.

In addition to the basic “alternating duple and triple effects,” and simple call and response patterns which he utilized in compositions of the Early Period, Amu’s interest now extended to the use of vertical cross rhythms and the type of polyrhythmic organization one finds in traditional drumming. *Adawura bɔ me* exemplifies this turning point in his use of rhythmic procedures and his new concept of multipart relationships in choral music, while *Alegbegbe* and *Hyiawu* show the extent to which these procedures can be skilfully applied in writing art music in a contrapuntal style, something that he had been exploiting on a very limited scale here and there in the sections of some of the songs of the Early Period.

Compositions in which polyrhythmic techniques are used are characterized by the presence of two contrasting rhythms in the same piece:

1) **Lyrical rhythms** – usually the rhythms of the main melodic phrase and its supporting part in parallel thirds, and
2) **Percussive rhythms** enunciated by a lower or upper part, depending on the part assigned the melodic phrase.

The simplest example of this principle can be found in the song *Akyede pa mafọ Nyame de ama me*. The first two words, *akye de pa*, provide the percussive rhythm. Amu utilizes similar percussive
rhythms consisting of monosyllables (e.g. *mo*) or two and three-syllable words (*bisa, tutu, bubu, hyiawu*) and short phrases in many of the songs of this period.

The new interest in percussive rhythms also led to the use of wider intervals within phrases than one usually finds in his early works, in particular rising and descending 6ths, 7ths, and octaves.

Because Amu drew on the rhythmic potential of words and phrases, he also became more conscious of the relationship between speech tones and melody. While in the Early Period melodic interest often led here and there to changes in the speech tones, especially when the same tune was set to different verses, in the Middle Period the relationship was consciously observed as far as possible in all the voices. This was one reason why he now preferred free or contrapuntal part writing to the homophonic style, for each voice could be set to appropriate materials from the text where there was a conflict between the progressions required by the harmony and the intonation contour of the principal text. It also accounts for the frequent use of parallel motion between two or three voices and the frequent use of the first inversion of diatonic major and minor triads in his music.

In general Amu kept to the diatonic harmonies he had used in the Early Period, except that occasionally he allowed himself the freedom to modulate to other keys. This is particularly so in *Alegbegbe* which seems to be a test piece in which he brought all his new ideas of composition together.

**Song Text of the Middle Period**

Interest in technical sophistication did not minimize Amu’s concern with the communication of ideas or his reflections on events in song. He continued to write both sacred and secular songs and to derive inspiration from current events and requests from friends for songs for special occasions. Thus when Nana Sir Ofori Atta died in 1943, it inspired him to write two songs for performance by the students of Achimota School during his memorial celebration. The first was a mourning song based on the praise texts of the drum language and the poetry of Seperewa players. There is no mention of the name of Nana Ofori Atta. Instead, we have the following praise appellations:

- **Boafo – ako – ako adi aninsem**  
  Boafo the fighter who performs deeds of valor

- **Ammɔ soansan ɔdi aninsem**  
  True-to-his-word who performs deeds of valor

- **Okumanini**  
  Destroyer of the mighty

- **Anomaa pa bi ɔkaa asuogya**  
  The “priceless” bird left on the other side of the river

The second song was a patriotic song inspired by what he saw of Nana Ofori Atta’s contribution to the political development of Ghana. Using him as the source of inspiration but without mentioning his name, Amu states what the nation demands of each and everyone is nothing less than loyalty, perseverance, watchfulness, vigil, hard fight, strife and reflection.
On the same basis the retirement of Chapman-Nyaho, the first African Headmaster of Achimota inspired him to write a song. So did his own wedding and that of a close British colleague. As with the other songs, he does not mention the specific persons or the incidents that inspired these compositions. He preferred to highlight the abiding message and experience of each occasion.

The Need for Training and Discipline

The compositions of the Middle Period raised a number of problems for both performers and listeners accustomed to the style of the Early Period. They demanded new modes of listening as well as greater effort and concentration on the part of performers, for music in which the parts move independently most of the time demand the kind of discipline familiar to drummers who play polyrhythms but which is beyond singers accustomed to singing in unison or in parallel thirds or fourths. Similarly the use of wide intervals, rising and descending octaves and other technical features of the new style demanded training. The required discipline and training could only be achieved when choral groups and even students who learn these songs by rote are directed and taught by people who are musically literate and have themselves acquired this basic training.

Related to discipline and training was the question of continuity. Because the theory and materials developed by Amu in the Early Period had been accepted as part of the music program at Akropong Presbyterian Training College, the program in African music initiated by him did not stop when he left. His successor who had been privately tutored by him continued to teach “African rhythm” as part of the music course and to compose his own music in the African idiom. The experience of the Early Period and his sojourn in London confirmed the need for making similar institutional arrangements at Achimota first to ensure continuity and second, to provide training in African music for those who might be teaching it in secondary schools and Training Colleges, and who may also compose music in the new idiom and direct choirs, for there was much that he could pass on in the light of his own background and experience to advanced students.

Amu’s aspiration was fulfilled when the Department of Education set up a Specialist Training College on the campus of Achimota, with music as one of the departments. This enabled him to attract a number of teachers with substantial background in music as composers, performers and teachers of music theory to the program.

For a while it seemed that Achimota would be the new center for African music. Drumming, singing and dancing in the traditional style, choral singing in the new idiom, the making and playing of bamboo flutes and odurugya by art students and later by music students, that training of specialist music teachers, the preparation of concert programs devoted to African music and the provision of background African music for plays produced on the campus of Achimota school as well as the campus of the University of Ghana set up on the same location – all these gave a dynamic quality to the program initiated by Amu who, for the most part worked single-handed and yet managed to find time for writing new choral works. This program, however, was not destined for the nation’s capital. For when it was decided to establish a University College of Science and Technology in Kumasi, the Music School set up in 1949 was transferred along with other departments in the Specialist Training College to Kumasi in 1951 to form the nucleus of the University.
COMPOSITIONS AND MUSICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE LATER PERIOD 1952 TO THE PRESENT

The transfer of Amu’s School of Music to Kumasi did not curtail his activities as a teacher, composer and cultural activist, for he seems to derive inspiration from any environment in which he works. Moreover, Ashanti had always been an important venue for his research because of his interest in the seperewa harp lute, odurugya and other court music. He therefore associated himself with the Ashanti Cultural Center which had just been set up and also with the choir of the Presbyterian Church in Kumasi.

As in the previous periods he responded favorably to requests from individuals and institutions for assistance. The Department of Social Welfare which had been organizing and training village brass bands to back up their mass literacy and education programs asked him for a piece for their brass band competition and help in adjudication. This, I believe, was the only time he wrote a short piece – in his own style – for instruments other than bamboo flutes and odurugya. Similarly he wrote a song for the inauguration of Opoku Ware Secondary School, while St. Louis Girls’ Secondary School in Kumasi gave him the opportunity of writing a few three-part songs for female voices.

It was his association with the choir of the Presbyterian Church in Kumasi that greatly inspired his creativity and output. It provided a new opportunity for working with a disciplined choir and for bringing to culmination the concept of sacred choral music he had begun at Akropong and for which he had developed further technical sophistication in the Middle Period. The works of this period, such as Kɔ na Kɔtutu, and Asomdwoe mu na Mekɔ Makɔda are amongst the most elegant and popular compositions of Amu.

After nine years in Kumasi, Amu again had to change his place of work and areas of emphasis, for it was decided to move his School of Music from the University of Science and Technology back to Southern Ghana, this time to Winneba. This is because the Ministry of Education decided to decentralize the units of the Specialist Training College. Since Amu had already passed the mandatory retirement age, he decided not to go to Winneba with the School, but go on retirement. He was granted two more years at the University to do field research in traditional music and to record music from different parts of the country, having been awarded a grant by the Rockefeller Foundation for this purpose. This enabled him to renew his interest in African musicology begun in the later 1920s.

On completion of his field work, he was offered appointment at the Institute of African Studies by the University of Ghana so that he could continue with his musicological studies and pass on his experience as a composer and music educator to the students of the new School of Music and Drama that had just been established on the campus of the University in response to the interest expressed by President Kwame Nkrumah in the establishment of an African Academy of Music. This Academy was to be set up in recognition of the work of Amu. Accordingly, he was made the convener of a small committee set up by the Office of the President to submit proposals for the consideration of the President. It was fitting, therefore, that Amu should be associated with the School of Music and Drama which grew out of the original proposal.
Amu chose the final phase of the Later Period as the time to consolidate his work in choral music. Following his experience with the Kumasi Choir, he felt that what he needed to do was to set up a model choir that would learn and interpret his songs – especially the works of the Middle and Later Periods – in the way they should. He decided to establish such a choir in his hometown Peki Avetile. He spent the first few years of his stay in Legon on this project, but relaxed when he found later that this was also the ambition of a few choirs in the capital and elsewhere and that his goals for choral music would not only be upheld but extended by choral directors and other composers.

**National and International Recognition of Amu’s Musical Career**

Thus far Amu had confined himself almost exclusively to Ghana. Except for his sojourn in London and a consultant mission in Liberia, he had devoted all his life to the cause of music in Ghana and written almost exclusively with the Ghanaian audience in mind. An opportunity for performing his songs abroad came in 1969 when the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York invited the School of Music and Drama of which he had been made Head to participate in the International University Choral Festival. In addition to the set pieces required by the Festival, he prepared his own repertoire of songs and atenteben music for presentation not only at the Lincoln Center but also on a number of University campuses in the United States. Describing one of the performances in Washington, a critic noted that

“The highest drama of the evening came with Ghana Choir’s folk-like songs written by their Director E. Amu and sung in their own languages.”

James Anquandah reports that when he asked Dr. Amu in an interview in 1972 what he considered to be the proudest moment in his life thus far, he replied:

“I think this was when we have our concert in New York City. Just as we were singing our last item, and it happened to be the weaving song *Bonwire Kente*, before we finished, the whole audience got up and applauded and applauded. I thought that was a grand moment in my life.”

Before this event, the University of Ghana had awarded him the Honorary Doctorate Degree in Music in 1965 in recognition of his contribution to music in Ghana in the fields of composition, music education and musicology. In 1969, the Government of Ghana had similarly presented him the Grand Medal, while the Arts Council of Ghana later presented him with a citation and an award on August 26, 1972. These series of awards culminated in an international award – the International Music Council – UENSOCO Music Prize – at a ceremony held in Bratislava in 1979.

Blessed with longevity, Amu has lived to see the seeds he sowed in the 1920s bear fruit, for today there are many composers – some of them former students of his – and choral groups that take works in the African idiom seriously. An Amu Choral Festival instituted by the Government of Ghana and run by the Arts Council of Ghana is held annually in his honor, a festival at which his music and compositions by other Ghanaians can be heard. His work in music education and more especially the foundations he laid for African musicology have been greatly expanded.
It is indeed a great pleasure and an honor to have been invited by Dr. Amu to write this introduction to his collected works. It is my hope that a more detailed study of his life and work will be undertaken, for I believe that the story of his life needs to be better known not only to Ghanaians but also to the world of music.

J.H. Kwabena Nketia